

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY: Building relationships & mutual respect

“I only remember this place as a Bank. Then it changed. It was amazing to see the lights on the wall looking like the river, and I felt good singing there with the people all gathered around, and they were all different kinds of people. With the two dancers moving all over the space, and me singing. I felt inspired. And when we left the Bank, and all the people followed me down to the River to pour the little bowls of water back in, I felt awesome. It’s one of my favorite hymns, *Just a little prayer and faith goes a mighty long way*, and when I come to the part ‘Walkin’ up and down the street, Tellin’ everybody you meet’ I was actually walking up and down the street, and the whole crowd was following me. The road was dark with little lights along the way, and when we got to the River and we felt blessed. It was beautiful. Now, I might see someone who was there that night, and they will come up and speak to me, and say they enjoyed it. Now we know each other, and that’s the best part. I’m looking forward to doing it again.” *Irene Moore, Chestertown Elder and Gospel Singer*



“As a scientist who has worked on the river (fish research for about 10 of my 17 years at the College), I thought that I had a fairly deep understanding and appreciation of the river, but interacting with members of the Chestertown community...made it clear to me how narrow my own focus on the river has been: beauty, recreation, research—and all over what I thought was a long period (17 years). After working with several senior members of the Chestertown community I realized that my 17 years was a very short time when compared with how long the Chestertown community has interacted with the river; that is, for hundreds of years. My perspective on the Chestertown community and the people who make it up has been indelibly altered through my involvement in *WaterLines*...It was and remains very moving, particularly the walk to the waterfront [from the bank] with the accompanying singing lead by Irene.” *Martin Connaughton, Biologist and Washington College Professor*

“The *WaterLines* project brought a new, contemporary way of thinking about art and engagement with art to the Chestertown community, which is more used to traditional approaches. There was a sense of excitement as various community members were interviewed by the artists and saw their histories/ input portrayed in the final vault of memories and the culminating performance. That main evening event—with dancers and the light and sound installations—was a communal experience that brought the community together in an exciting way. Everyone felt part of something special as we left the ethereal atmosphere of the bank building and processed to the river to release our ceremonial cups of water back to the Chester.” *Kay MacIntosh, Chestertown Arts and Entertainment District Economic Development & Marketing Coordinator*

“Perhaps the most startling part of the *WaterLines* project was that it brought people together who, although they live and work in very close proximity, rarely share cultural events together. Like many places with a history of segregation, most of the town’s events are divided, but this one decidedly was not. On top of helping people ask what else can happen here, the project helped people think about why they had never been in this place or at this type of event before.” *Andrew N. Case, Washington College Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow*

“...*WaterLines* managed to bring the town, and college together in a shared experience. It also represented one of the rare instances where the African American community engaged on a large scale with the arts in the town, and with the College. Something that has not happened enough. I believe that I gained a greater understanding of the local communities, and the investments that previous generations made in the River, and its economy and culture. Which are now sadly absent.” *Sean Meade, SANDBOX Program Assistant*

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: Deepening connection to place

“For those of us who have lived in this area for many years, *WaterLines* was saturated with memory and love—memory of the buildings, businesses, people and seasons that have come and gone, and love for the river and its marshes, shorebirds, shifting tides, and halcyon days of sunlight on the water. Such feelings are warm and joyful but also fraught with anxiety as the ecological challenges to our beloved home become more obvious. In the ever-shifting, contemplative space created by this installation, the mind quieted and breathing took on the measured cadence of the phantom shimmering waves. Gradually, the flow of light and sound began to feel curiously more real and authentic than the everyday world of computers, phone calls, cars and schedules. Simultaneously, fear of change slowly gave way to a deeper understanding that what we are called on to do is to welcome and acknowledge change and use our innate creativity to adapt to its gifts and challenges.” *Mary McCoy, Contributing Arts Editor The Chestertown Spy*

“What was so stimulating about the *WaterLines* project is that it engaged both the natural and cultural and showed how intertwined they can be. Many people who are concerned about natural ecology and environmental issues pay little attention to the complex and at times conflicting human perspectives that also shape a place. Likewise, those who love the history and architecture of a place like the Chester River waterfront can easily ignore the nonhuman stories the place can tell as well. The *WaterLines* project produced a compelling experience in which to explore how the natural and cultural complexities of place rather than just a simple narrative of progress or decline.” *Andrew N. Case, Washington College Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow*

WATER: Restoring bond between town & river

“Kent County is small in size and population. Its main characteristics are that it is rural, and comparatively isolated from places that are closer to cities and suburbs. If I were to group the types of people, I would say: academic/worldly and rural/provincial (both black and white). *WaterLines*, with its message of the value of water (more precious than gold) was appreciated by both groups because of the universality of the message, the soulful artistry of the presentation, and the innovative, passionate methods of engaging the community. By encouraging everyone to tell stories about relationships with the River, one heard both from traditional watermen who have worked the River forever, and from newly arrived folks who enjoy the River for pleasure. African Americans told stories and sang songs; elders at the Senior Center told stories and created dance movements; school children dipped water from the River and found meaning in this involvement.” ***Leslie Prince Raimond, Kent County Arts Council Executive Director***

“Our third grade from Henry Highland Garnett Elementary School took part in a great experience with *WaterLines* last spring. The field trip brought a deeper understanding of the importance of the river to our students/community of Chestertown. This experience was valuable as we were able to walk and experience our town on the walk. Many students who live blocks from the river do not often go to the river and I believe now that they have visited it and know some history about the river they will make a point to go with their family. Seeing community members on the field trip was valuable as these individuals are members of some of our church communities and are well respected by our children. I believe any opportunity we can experience that brings art, dance, storytelling and music to real world experience is memorable to the elementary age child.” ***Flo Terrill, Henry Highland Garnett Elementary School Third-Grade Teacher***

“One of the oldest members of the community shared with me that the performance and experience of dancing with her town provided a deepened connection to people and place, and that this newfound connection created a greater sense of responsibility to the future of the Chester River.” ***Cassie Meador, WaterLines Choreographer***